

7-2013

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.1863>

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Citation

WOODS, Stephen A.; LIEVENS, Filip; DE FRUYT, Filip; and WILLE, Bart. Personality across working life: The longitudinal and reciprocal influences of personality on work. (2013). *Journal of Organizational Behavior*. 34, (S1), S7-S25. Research Collection Lee Kong Chian School Of Business.

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Personality Across Working Life:
The Longitudinal and Reciprocal Influences of Personality on Work

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Cite as:

Woods, S. A., Lievens, F., De Fruyt, F., & **Wille, B.** (2013). Personality across working life: The longitudinal and reciprocal influences of personality on work. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 34, 7-25.

Abstract

This paper focuses on the role of personality at different stages of people's working lives. We begin by reviewing the research in industrial, work, and organizational (IWO) psychology regarding the longitudinal and dynamic influences of personality as an *independent* variable at different career stages, structuring our review around a framework of people's working lives and careers over time. Next, we review recent studies in the personality and developmental psychology domain regarding the influence of changing life roles on personality. In this domain, personality also serves as *dependent* variable. By blending these two domains it becomes clear that the study of reciprocal effects of work and personality might open a new angle in IWO psychology's longstanding tradition of personality research. To this end, we outline various implications for conceptual development (e.g., trait stability) and empirical research (e.g., personality and work incongruence). Finally, we discuss some methodological and statistical considerations for research in this new research domain. In the end, our review should enrich the way that IWO psychologists understand personality at work, focusing away from its unidirectional predictivist influence on job performance towards a more complex longitudinal reciprocal interplay of personality and working life.

Personality Across Working Life: The Longitudinal and
Reciprocal Influences of Personality on Work

Over the past quarter century, few topics in organizational behavior and work and organizational psychology have attracted more pages of journal space than personality research. The centrality of personality in so much organizational behavior theory is all the more remarkable because it represents for personality trait theory particularly, a dramatic turnaround of fortune. Beginning in the late 1980s, and consolidating in the now famous meta-analyses of the 1990s (e.g., Barrick & Mount, 1991; Salgado, 1997; Tett, Jackson, Rothstein, & Reddon, 1994), research has established the predictive associations of personality with a broad range of organizational criteria (for an overview, see Judge, Klinger, Simon, and Yang, 2008).

Despite the obvious successes of such research, there are key trends within the literature that are problematic for further development of theory and understanding of the role of personality in organizational behavior. These trends stem principally from a persistent preoccupation of researchers on the question of personality trait validity; the use of personality trait assessments to predict performance immediately following selection. This topic, while undoubtedly important, has we feel, detracted from an integrated understanding of how personality traits relate to organizational behavior across people's working lives in the longer term.

In particular, the focus on predictive validity has resulted in two important limitations in the current literature. First, the relations of personality and criteria are implicitly treated as static. The vast majority of published studies are either cross-sectional or longitudinal across only two time points. In a typical longitudinal study of personality and performance, traits are measured at time 1 and performance at time 2, and prospective associations calculated. Is it reasonable to

assume that these relations remain the same in the long-term? Most people would intuitively accept that performance demands change over time, and indeed performance theory has formalized this point (Murphy, 1989). Working lives and the demands and contexts that they present are dynamic and changeable and so it follows that the relations of traits and criteria may also dynamically change over time and at different career stages. This perspective is rarely acknowledged in research.

Second, in almost all studies in organizational behavior, personality is treated solely as a *predictor* variable. The literature on the longitudinal stability of personality (Roberts & DelVecchio, 2000) means that for the purpose of theory building, it is convenient to conceptualize personality as a stable property of the person that predicts behavioral, emotional, or attitudinal outcomes. However, in other domains outside industrial, work and organizational (IWO) psychology, the possibility that personality traits may both affect, and be affected by work, has been recently considered (e.g., Wille, Beyers, & De Fruyt, in press; Wu & Griffin, 2012). Work is a core part of everybody's lives, and to purport that the direction of influence from personality to work is only one way, rather than reciprocal, seems closed-minded.

Therefore, this paper has two aims. First, we adopt a whole-career perspective and review the role of personality at different stages of people's working lives. Specifically, we examine the longitudinal and dynamic influences of personality traits at different career stages. This first part of the paper is mostly focused on longitudinal research in IWO psychology, although we will also include relevant studies from developmental psychology. In this body of research, personality plays its traditional role as independent variable for predicting stable or dynamic criteria across career stages.

Second, we provide a review of the emerging literature on the influence of changing life roles on personality. This review is almost entirely based on recent studies outside the IWO

domain as the studies reviewed come from personality and developmental psychology. Here personality typically serves as the dependent variable, with the focus on the reciprocal effects between personality and work.

We believe that the blending of insights resulting from these two aims might be extremely fruitful for enriching the way that IWO psychologists understand personality at work, focusing away from its simple predictivist influence on job performance, and towards a more complex longitudinal reciprocal interplay of personality and working life. To this end, the last section of this paper presents the implications for theory, future research, and methodology that result from our review.

Note that we conceptualize personality in terms of the five-factor model (FFM). So, our review concentrates on evidence from studies in which personality is operationalized using the personality factors of Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Emotional Stability (vs. Neuroticism), and Openness.

Personality and Working Life: Dynamic and Developmental Interactions

In our review of the interactions of personality and work across the lifespan, we adopt a framework based on Super's (1980) career stages (i.e., Growth, Exploration, Establishment, Maintenance, Disengagement). In each case, we review the longitudinal and/or dynamic associations of personality and outcomes, thereby avoiding simple associative research findings deliberately.

Working life as described in the Super framework represents a dynamic background for behavior and personality expression, comprising multiple contexts, demands and challenges. Social cognitive theories of personality (Mischel & Shoda, 1998) emphasize the contextual

factors that influence behavior. In particular, the work of Mischel on situational strength and behavior encouraged a focus on the conditions under which traits are likely to manifest in behavior, leading to the development of Trait Activation Theory (TAT; Tett & Burnett, 2003). In TAT, behavior results from an interaction between person and situation, with situations acting as cues to activate certain traits. Specific traits are expressed in behavior when the situation or context allows freedom of trait expression (i.e. the situation is weak) and the features of the situation activate those specific traits.

TAT is relevant in the longitudinal examination of personality and its interaction with work because over time, the demands, contexts, and situational features of work are in a state of flux. Even over relatively short periods of time, the demands that are placed on workers may change (Thoresen, Bradley, Bliese, & Thoreson, 2004), such that performance and other outcomes at two points in time might result from different behavior-in-context combinations and therefore be related to different traits. More broadly, traits that are activated at one stage of a person's career (e.g., career exploration) may be different from those activated at others (e.g., career establishment). TAT provides also a framework for understanding person-job fit, whereby a person's situational responses make them suitable for specific kinds of work activity. Thus, the TAT framework enables theoretical modelling of the dynamic effects of personality on work outcomes across time and in different vocational environments.

Growth: Echoes of Childhood at Work

People's vocational life commences long before the first job. Although studies of elementary school children suggest that they do not have well-formulated vocational interests (Tracey, 2001), Woods and Hampson (2010) proposed that childhood personality traits are a

potential major influence on the development of vocational interests. That is, certain personality traits (specifically Openness, Conscientiousness, and Extraversion) might lead children to gravitate toward certain kinds of activity and therefore to acquire certain competencies that in turn lead to the shaping of vocational interests, and later life vocational choices. So, at an early age, the natural tendencies of children to be more experimental (Openness), social (Extraversion), or methodical (Conscientiousness) might lead children to develop the skills and competencies that contribute to preferences for certain kinds of job activity.

In support of this, Woods and Hampson (2010) reported findings from the Hawaii personality and health cohort study, examining the prospective associations of personality traits measured at ages 6-12, with occupation characteristics (classified on Holland's RIASEC dimensions; Holland, 1997) at mid-life. Their findings showed prospective associations of personality and occupations across more than 40 years in some cases, with Openness being associated with Artistic, Investigative and Conventional (negative), and Conscientiousness associated with all of the vocational types (negatively with Realistic). Woods and Hampson (2010) also demonstrated the moderation of the association of Openness and occupational environments by gender. The proposed theoretical explanation was imagination and experimentation, and the tendency of children higher on Openness to go against the gender stereotypic norm, to imagine themselves in a wider range of potential adult roles and therefore to develop self-concepts that are less reliant on and consistent with gender stereotypes. In sum, there appears to be an early interaction of personality and work, with traits pushing children towards certain activities and preferences. The contexts of exploring activity preferences and competencies represent weak situations that activate the personality traits and natural preferences of children. The pathways of working life, and the role of work in identity seem to be set in "skeleton form" in early years of childhood.

The College Years: Personality and Preparation for Working Life

Personality in adolescence and early adulthood also exerts major influences on later-life career outcomes through education attainment. The success that people achieve during their education has a substantial impact on their occupational trajectory, and simultaneously opens up some career opportunities, while closing others.

Traits such as Conscientiousness and Emotional Stability have been identified as consistent longitudinal non-cognitive associates of educational attainment (e.g., Chamorro-Premuzic & Furnham, 2003). Interestingly, several independent studies also point to dynamic relations of traits with criteria, whereby personality traits assume greater or lesser predictive power at different stages of tertiary education, and on different indicators. For instance, Zyphur et al. (2008) analysed the associations of cognitive ability and personality on grade point average over time. They reported that while both cognitive ability and Conscientiousness were associated with initial performance, only Conscientiousness related to performance growth. Students higher on Conscientiousness improved their GPA over time, whereas students' cognitive ability did not predict change in performance.

In another study, Lievens et al (2009) reported the changing validities of personality traits over seven years of medical school. Their findings pointed to the increasing validity of personality for predicting performance over time. Specifically, while personality had small or negligible associations with performance in year 1, by year 7 some effect sizes for personality traits had risen to above 0.40. Facets of Conscientiousness, Openness, and Extraversion measured at enrolment were moderately strong predictors of academic achievement and performance in medical training at year 7.

How can these dynamic effects of personality on academic performance be explained? Such dynamic effects are often linked to changing educational demands. For instance, in the medical education study, in year 1, the emphasis was on developing declarative and procedural knowledge, which was likely to draw more on cognitive ability. By year 7, however, medical students were required to work more in interpersonal contexts (e.g., internships, clerkships) wherein being sociable, motivated and open became key assets. This is a clear example of TAT in action, with traits being associated with outcomes when situations trigger trait-related behaviors that are likely to result in differentiated performance.

Career Exploration: Becoming the Worker

Entering the working world presents a new context for people's lives. Becoming a worker or employee presents a new set of challenges and a platform for growth and development. Obvious potential influences of personality on career exploration are through its effects on vocational interests and choices. If personality is indicative of vocational interests, then it should be possible to observe its effects on occupational choice over time. People's traits should relate to their choices of careers over the course of their lives, with people selecting jobs that fit with their interests, and by extension, their personality traits. Over the years, a large body of research has found support for this gravitation hypothesis.

In a longitudinal test of this gravitation hypothesis, Judge, Higgins, Thoresen, and Barrick (1999) examined whether the Big Five traits measured in adolescence were associated with the RIASEC characteristics of occupational environments later in life. They reported prospective associations of Openness with Artistic and Conventional (negative) occupations, Agreeableness with Social and Investigative (negative), and Extraversion and Realistic. These longitudinal

findings are complemented by studies examining the predictive validities of vocational interest measures for predicting occupational choices in early adulthood (e.g., De Fruyt & Mervielde, 1999). So, in line with our earlier conclusions, it seems that personality traits, through vocational interests, influence the occupations that people select as they enter work (Woods & Hampson, 2010).

Career Establishment and Maintenance

In Super's framework, establishment and maintenance of a career are treated as distinct stages, and collectively cover around 40 years of working life. While we acknowledge that this period constitutes the major part of people's careers, and therefore comprises a variety of challenges and diverse demands, for the purposes of our review, we will explore the role of personality within these stages together. We make a distinction between the effects of personality on motivation, performance, and motivation on the one hand and the effects of personality on performance trajectories on the other hand.

Personality and Work Motivation, Performance, and Satisfaction. One of the most well known findings in the field of personality is that high Conscientiousness and low Neuroticism are related to job performance (Hurtz & Donovan, 2000) and career success (Judge et al., 1999). It is noteworthy that meta-analytic research also demonstrated that these same two FFM traits are related to performance motivation (Judge & Ilies, 2002) and to satisfaction at work (Judge, Heller, & Mount, 2002). Moreover, these results conform to meta-analytic correlations between the FFM traits and life satisfaction (DeNeve & Cooper, 1998). So, prior research provides evidence of relatively robust relations between specific FFM traits (Conscientiousness and Neuroticism) and motivation, satisfaction, and performance, respectively. Although a full process

model has not been tested, it seems like motivational and core self-evaluative processes serve as the intermediate mechanisms by which some FFM traits are predictive of performance and satisfaction (Barrick, Mount, & Strauss, 1993; Bono & Judge, 2003).

Illustrative evidence for this kind of effect may be taken from studies of job characteristics. Judge, Bono, and Locke (2000) found that people with high core self-evaluations actually attained more challenging jobs within their careers. This reflects a process by which people with higher self-efficacy and self-esteem tend to set themselves and accept more challenging goals and tasks, and be more motivated to achieve them (Bono & Judge, 2003; Erez & Judge, 2001). The role of Neuroticism in vocational behavior might also be understood in the context of an approach/avoidance framework (Ferris, Rosen, Johnson, Brown, Risavy, & Heller 2011). Low emotional stability (or high Neuroticism) is associated with an avoidant approach, in which people select tasks, activities and behavioral strategies with the aim of minimizing threat of failure. For example, Woods, Patterson, and Koczwara (2013) examined the association of the Big Five with occupational specialty choice in a sample of junior medics and found that choice of Realistic (e.g. Surgery) and Enterprising (e.g. Acute Medicine) specialties, which generally have greater individual responsibility, were associated with low Neuroticism.

Integrating the above with the observation that people higher on Conscientiousness are more achievement oriented and likely to be committed to delivering on goals and objectives (Barrick, Mount & Strauss, 1993) suggests that individuals with combined high Conscientiousness and low Neuroticism are likely to grasp opportunities to work on challenging and complex tasks, without the demotivating effects of fearing failure or a negative outcome. Taken together, job characteristics such as job complexity, skill variety, and autonomy represent mechanisms by which in their working lives, people lower in Neuroticism and higher in Conscientiousness attain more positive and rewarding jobs.

This research base underlines the importance of longitudinal and developmental perspectives of the association of personality and organizational behavior. The association of personality and job satisfaction is most often understood as an affective one (e.g., Heller, Judge, & Watson, 2002). In such models, Neuroticism and the positive emotional component of Extraversion are assumed to influence job satisfaction because the effects of negative and positive affect respectively mean that people attend to and perceive their job characteristics as either generally more unfavorable or favorable. However, by looking at such associations from a developmental perspective, incorporating ideas of performance motivation, core-self-evaluative and approach/avoidance tendencies, and their cumulative effects over careers and working lives on job decisions, the affective explanation becomes only part of the picture. Rather, in combination with achievement-related traits such as Conscientiousness, dispositional affective personality traits such as Neuroticism may have real impact on actual attainment of jobs with more rewarding and satisfying features and characteristics.

A related, yet somewhat poorly understood area of focus is the relation of personality with burnout. Meta-analyses (Alarcon, Eschleman, & Bowling, 2009) suggest that all of the Big Five except Openness are associated with burnout, but the vast majority of studies in the area are cross-sectional. Longitudinal studies again suggest dynamic associations of personality and burnout. In a study of nurses, Deary, Watson, and Hogston (2003) found that Neuroticism measured at entry into a nursing program was a significant predictor of emotional exhaustion at 12 months, but not at 24 months. Openness was positively related to Emotional Exhaustion at 24 months, but not at 12 months. Similarly, Armon, Shirom, and Melamed (2012) reported that Neuroticism was a negative predictor of future emotional exhaustion, contrary to expectations, and that Conscientiousness was a positive predictor of Emotional Exhaustion, but a negative predictor of Cognitive Weariness. One possible explanation is one of dynamic effects by which

people high in Neuroticism withdraw from threatening situations that might lead to Emotional Exhaustion, whereas people higher in Conscientiousness, while more motivated and invested at work, may be so focused on work that they are at higher risk of burnout in the long term.

Personality and Performance Trajectories. As noted at the outset of our review, the treatment of job performance as a stable construct constitutes an important limitation in the personality and performance literature (Thoresen et al., 2004). This runs counter to evidence suggesting that for most people, performance increases linearly, then plateaus following a learning curve, and eventually declines over long periods (Zyphur, Chaturvedi, & Arvey, 2008). If performance is incorrectly assumed to be stable, then theoretical perspectives on personality and performance may be likewise incorrect. Longitudinal studies of personality and performance trajectories address this concern head-on and have uncovered some key relationships and effects that build understanding of how personality influences performance over time.

Perspectives on individual differences and job performance seem to converge on the idea that performance results from a combination of ability and motivation (e.g. Zyphur et al., 2008). The problem-solving advantage given by cognitive ability may be thought of as the “can do” of performance, with the motivational drive to initiate and persist in goal-directed behavior being thought of as the “will do” of performance (Gottfredson, 2002). The treatment of performance as a stable construct assumes that both elements remain equally important over time. However, it is more intuitively accessible to conceive that “can-do” and “will-do” aspects of performance are more or less important at different job stages.

Differentiating transitional job stages (where demands are novel, and not clearly defined) from maintenance job stages (where workers have generally mastered the tasks and activities associated with their jobs), Murphy (1989) proposed that cognitive ability would be most predictive of performance at transition stages and that personality factors would become more

important during maintenance stages. Recent research has taken this theorizing a step further to examine the differentiation of personality associations of performance within different job stages. Thoresen et al. (2004) examined how personality dimensions of the Big Five model differentiated sales performance among individuals at two different job stages, and also the association of the Big Five with performance growth (i.e. performance change over time at different job stages). They observed differential patterns of prediction in maintenance and transitional employee samples. Conscientiousness was associated with mean performance and performance growth in the maintenance sample (see also Zyphur et al., 2008). Extraversion was associated with mean performance. In the transitional sample, Openness and Agreeableness were positively associated with mean performance and also with performance growth. Thoresen et al. (2004) reasoned that in the transitional sample, adaptive behavior (associated with Openness) and interpersonal network building (associated with Agreeableness) were the most likely reasons for enhanced sales performance. In a related study, Stewart (1999) showed that the dependability aspects of Conscientiousness (e.g., self-discipline) were related to job performance at the transitional stage, whereas the volitional facets of Conscientiousness (e.g., achievement motivation) were linked to job performance at the maintenance stage.

Openness has also been implicated as influential in performance trajectories. Minbashian, Earl and Bright (in press) examined performance trajectories of 129 newly employed professionals. They found that performance plateaued on average at 2.93 years, and then started to decline. Performance deceleration was slower for those higher on Openness, which reflects the higher levels of learning orientation for those high on Openness, which may lead them to focus on mastering tasks that are beneficial for performance in the long term according to Minbashian et al. (in press). The results of studies that look at the dynamic relations of personality and performance are compelling, but until recently have lacked a strong theoretical framework for

understanding the pattern of relations. TAT affords such a theoretical lens. Maintenance and transitional job stages are simply two forms of situational features that act as contexts for job performance. Work presents people with a wider variety of challenges and a richer palette of situational variance, to which they must respond in order to facilitate performance and growth over time.

Taken together, the findings of studies looking at performance trajectories and the theoretical frameworks used to understand them suggest a clearer picture of how personality traits influence performance and growth in people's working lives. Through the course of their careers, people encounter a variety of different job demands. These demands act as situational cues that activate personality traits, and trigger responses. The nature of those responses in context influences their relative effectiveness, with clear implications for performance, advancement and growth over time. Conscientiousness appears to predict performance growth and general performance effort over time, Openness rather predicts adaptation and is more important in transitional contexts. Results such as those of Thoresen et al. (2004) also point to job specificity in these processes.

Retirement

Although there is now increasing societal debate about the appropriate age for retirement, at a certain point of time every worker is allowed or obliged to retreat from the professional labour market. Given the significance of this key life experience, individuals' adaptation to retirement has been a focal point for researchers as well as more popular media (Wang, 2007). However, we found only one longitudinal study. Löckenhoff, Terracciano, and Costa (2009) examined the relations between the Big Five personality traits and the retirement transition,

which reported little evidence indicating that personality traits predict future retirement. Clearly, given the aging workforce more research is needed in this area.

Conclusions

In this section we have reviewed literature on the longitudinal, dynamic and developmental relations of personality and work outcomes. During childhood and education, personality traits set people on a career path, the effects of which one can trace over many decades. Personality traits at this early stage also help people to navigate specific career and performance challenges, such as education attainment. In exploring the working world, a variety of traits predict occupational choices, and also occupational specialties. Those choices may have later effects on job satisfaction through the attainment of more rewarding and complex job roles.

We have argued for the importance of a dynamic model of performance demands, which change as a function of time, and present changing stages and contexts within which the effects of personality play out. While some traits, such as Conscientiousness may have more persistent performance benefits, others such as Agreeableness and Openness may again help people navigate specific stages of their careers and occupations, which in turn exert prospective effects on working life outcomes.

Finally, it is important to note that we covered here a selection of work outcomes from different domains, including occupational selection, work performance and adjustment, and occupational health. This does not mean, however, that our list of criteria is exhaustive. The research on work stress, for instance, could only be briefly touched upon in this review. Similarly, as noted in the introduction, this review was restricted to cover only general personality studies, while increasing attention is also being devoted to the prospective effects of

more maladaptive or aberrant personality tendencies on various work-related outcomes (e.g., Moscoso & Salgado, 2004; Wille, De Fruyt, & De Clercq, in press).

Reciprocal Relations between Personality and Working Life

Complementing the evidence for the relative stability of personality (Roberts & DelVecchio, 2000), there is now increasing consensus that traits also continue to develop throughout adult life (Roberts, Robins, Caspi, & Trzesniewski, 2003; Roberts, Walton, & Viechtbauer, 2006), and personality theory also shifts in that direction. Roberts and colleagues (Lodi-Smith & Roberts, 2007; Roberts, Wood, & Smith, 2005), for instance, propose the Social Investment Principle as a context-driven mechanism that accounts for changes in traits. The central hypothesis in this perspective is that age-graded social norms, such as entering a committed relationship or the workforce, drive personality in the direction of functional maturity, that is, greater emotional stability, dominance, agreeableness, and conscientiousness. The underlying mechanism involves a process of role taking across different life domains, including work (Wood & Roberts, 2006). When the individual commits to a social role, his/her personality shifts to reflect the expectations of that role. Behaviors within these social institutions are rewarded or punished based on role expectations, and personality change is therefore a response to these contingencies. Normative changes in personality traits are the result of most people engaging in social institutions (e.g., careers, marriage) at roughly the same time.

In the next sections, we provide evidence for this perspective on personality by reviewing studies, mainly from the personality and the developmental literature, which provide evidence for the reciprocity of personality and work across different stages in vocational development. As far

as possible, we again draw on Super's (1980) framework. We will use these findings to argue for a reframing of personality theory in the IWO literature.

Influences of Schooling on Personality

Already in childhood and early adolescence, aspects of vocational identity are formed that significantly impact later professional life (Hartung, Porfeli, & Vondracek, 2005). Relatively little is known, however, about the mechanisms behind childhood work socialization, and how this impacts personality trait development.

In one recent line of research, schooling is examined as a primary source of work socialization, influencing trait development. School represents an arena in which students themselves have to take on duties and responsibilities. They are expected to commit to the particular role expectations and social norms to master the challenges of everyday school life (Bleidorn, in press). Successful investment in this school role would require students to be task and goal directed, to be organized, to delay gratification, to follow prescribed norms, and to use effortful strategies.

In a recent study of 910 German high school students, Bleidorn (in press), examined to what extent investment in this student role influenced personality trait change, focusing on the period before high school graduation. This period can be considered a "strong situation" likely to promote personality trait change, because it includes a press for a new way of behaving while providing clear information how to behave adaptively (Bleidorn, in press). Results indicated that the rising goal of a successful graduation stimulated role-congruent behavior, which was in turn related to increases in Conscientiousness.

The College Years: Personality and Preparation for Working Life

As we have discussed, the college years are important professionally because they influence future vocational directions. However, for many people, the three, four, or five years at college also represent an important phase in their personal lives. Often, it is a stage of life in which people start or intensify the establishment of a personal and independent identity, using the specific challenges during this life stage (e.g., living independently, creating a new personal network, etc.) as building blocks. In developmental terms, these college years cover a period of “emerging” adulthood (Arnett, 2000), when individuals make major decisions concerning the shape and content of their life course: Will they marry? Will they have children? Which career will they pursue—the one with high financial rewards or the one that is personally rewarding?

Inspired by these questions, Roberts, O’Donnell, and Robins (2004) examined developmental trajectories in major life goals (i.e. economic, aesthetic, social, relationship, political, hedonistic, and religious) over a 4-year period covering the college years. Participants rated the importance of their life goals six times over a 4-year period and completed a measure of the Big Five personality traits at the beginning and end of college. The authors found a strong pattern of correspondence between the concurrent correlational pattern and the across-time change patterns. For example, Agreeableness was positively correlated with relationship goals (e.g., desiring a family), and changes in this trait were also positively associated with changes in this specific life goal. Similar observations were reported by Harms, Roberts and Winter (2006) who found that the traits that led an individual to fit well with the college environment were enhanced by the experience of being in that environment and increased over time. According to Roberts, Caspi, and Moffitt (2003), the major implication of this responsive mechanism is that each person’s developmental path is in part determined by his or her pre-existing personality

characteristics, and most people follow a path that deepens and reinforces those characteristics over time.

Of course, not everyone going through this period of young adulthood chooses the higher academic track, rather choosing a vocational track entering the working world somewhat earlier. Lüdtke, Roberts, Trautwein, and Nagy (2011) reported that these different life paths during emerging adulthood were predictive for different trait change patterns, particularly for Agreeableness and Conscientiousness (measured in their sample at 3 time points over 4 years). Entering some form of vocational training was negatively linked to growth in Agreeableness, indicating that on average participants who took the vocational track did not increase as fast on Agreeableness. In contrast, following the vocational track was positively linked to growth in Conscientiousness. The authors concluded that the changes that occur as a result of following these different paths reflect the idiosyncratic nature of the types of experiences found for this life path. Specifically, people embarking on more work-oriented tracks are supposed to be called upon to show potential employers that they are viable future employees by being hardworking and industrious. Conversely, the more competitive nature of these activities may lead to an increased attenuation of agreeableness in this stage of life.

Career Exploration: Effect of Early Work Experiences on Personality

Probably even more than moving from high school to college, the transition from college to work requires a significant change in mind for many individuals. From a developmental as well as from a vocational perspective, the initial years on the labour market are extremely important for future adaptation and adjustment. A handful of studies have examined the effects of initial work experiences on a broad range of personality-related variables. Roberts, Caspi and

Moffitt (2003) found a broad range of early career work experiences (i.e. occupational attainment, resource power, work satisfaction, work involvement, financial security, work autonomy, and work stimulation) to influence changes in affective dispositions such as measured by the Multidimensional Personality Questionnaire (MPQ; Tellegen, 1982).

More recently, Wille, Beyers and De Fruyt (2012) tracked young adults' personality and vocational development across the first 15 years after graduation. In a longitudinal college alumni sample, these authors specifically examined the reciprocal relations between FFM trait change and work experiences over this time interval, differentiating between six universal career roles (Maker, Expert, Presenter, Guide, Director, and Inspirator; Hoekstra, 2011). The results indicated that change in career role engagement was associated with change in four of the five personality traits over the same time interval. Only for Openness, no significant associations were found between trait change and change in career role engagement. Importantly, the results indicated that increases in career role engagement generally stimulated normative personality trait development. For example, normative decreases in Neuroticism were more pronounced for individuals showing stronger increases in director, presenter, and inspirator roles. Similarly, normative increases in Conscientiousness were more pronounced for individuals showing stronger increases in director, inspirator, guide, and expert roles. This is consistent with other research demonstrating that investment in the work role contributes to normative personality development (e.g., Roberts, Caspi, et al., 2003). However, the results also illustrate how investment in certain aspects of the work role can contribute to non-normative trait development (i.e., changes in personality traits that run counter to general trends). Specifically, Wille and colleagues (2012) found that stronger increases in the director and inspirator role during the first career stage were associated with smaller increases or even decreases in Agreeableness. Apparently, these two career roles impose certain behaviors or tendencies to people that buffer or hinder the naturally expected growth in

Agreeableness. Prior research had already demonstrated that non-normative trait change in young adulthood is associated with de-investment in the work role, like engagement in counterproductive work behaviors (Roberts, Walton, Bogg, & Caspi, 2006). The results of the study by Wille et al. (2012) shed a new light on this domain by showing that stronger work role involvement not necessarily contributes to normative personality development, but that the effect rather depends on the specific work role content.

Personality Development and Successful Career Establishment

Over the long period of career establishment and maintenance, the social investment perspective on personality development becomes particularly salient. A key principle in the social investment perspective is that *successful* investment in social roles, including the work role, should be a driving force behind trait development. While the IWO literature has up until now mainly focused on the validity of traits to predict objective and subjective aspects of career success, research in the personality domain has started to investigate such reciprocal relations over the past decade (Roberts, Caspi, et al., 2003; Roberts & Chapman, 2000; Scollon & Diener, 2006; Sutin et al., 2009).

In terms of subjective career success, Scollon and Diener (2006) examined the associations between change in extraversion and neuroticism on the one hand, and change in work role satisfaction on the other. They also explored patterns of trait change and reciprocal relations with work role satisfaction separately for a younger (under age 30) versus an older (age 30 and over) group of adults. Despite impressive rank-order stability of traits ($r > .60$ over the 8-year interval), significant within-person changes in neuroticism and extraversion were identified. Interestingly, individuals over age 30 exhibited just as much change as those under 30, thus

refuting the idea that personality becomes “set like plaster” by age 30 or that development slows down after young adulthood (Costa & McCrae, 2006). Regarding reciprocal effects, it was first found that increased work satisfaction accompanied decreases in neuroticism and increases in extraversion over time. Again, correlations among changes were similar for the older and younger samples, indicating that transactional influences on development are not limited to young adulthood or the early years of the career. Although the cross-lagged analyses provided more evidence for trait effects on (change in) work satisfaction, modest support was also gathered for work satisfaction leading to increased extraversion, a finding that supports social investment perspectives on trait development. At least, these findings lend further support for the idea that the social environment, including the work role, shapes personality and vice versa (Scollon & Diener, 2006).

More recently, Sutin and Costa (Sutin et al., 2009) considered indicators of extrinsic career success (i.e. occupational prestige and personal income) as a source of personality trait change. Cross-lagged models were used to test whether personality predicted change in career success over a 10-year interval and, likewise, whether these markers predicted change in personality. The longitudinal analyses provided clear evidence for reciprocal effects, at least among younger participants. Specifically, earning a higher income at baseline predicted decreases in Neuroticism across the 10 subsequent years.

Personality Change in Retirement

In contrast to the general consensus that retirement is a major life transition (Theriault, 1994) that might deeply affect patterns of everyday activities and social network composition, there exists surprisingly little research on retirement in relation to aspects of personality trait

change. One notable exception is the study of Löckenhoff et al. (2009) that we already discussed in the first part of our review. This study did not only examine longitudinal effects of the Big Five personality traits but also scrutinized reciprocal relations between personality and the retirement transition. For most aspects of personality, longitudinal analyses revealed high levels of stability across the retirement transition. However, a number of significant retirement-related changes in more specific aspects of extraversion and agreeableness were observed. After retirement, participants described themselves as less fast-paced and vigorous (decreased E4: Activity) as well as less competitive and argumentative (increased A4: Compliance) than before. Although evidence is still scarce, these examples carefully suggest that retirement might come with a specific set of challenges relevant to personality development.

Conclusions

We here presented studies from the personality and the development field that provide evidence for reciprocal relations between personality and work across different career stages. First, graduation from high school was identified as one of the primary transitional experiences in an individual's pre-vocational life calling for personality changes in the direction of greater maturity. In the same line, college experiences are predicted by and predict personality traits, and different life paths (educational vs. vocational tracks) during this demographically dense period of emerging adulthood seem to play a significant role therein. When eventually entering the labor market, occupational choices are made that generally serve to reinforce and deepen those personal characteristics that got people selected into these work environments in the first place, a mechanism referred to as the corresponive principle. Similarly, certain traits, like emotional

stability, predict the establishment of career success, a process that in turn contributes to normative personality development (e.g., increases in emotional stability).

Findings like these are consistent with the perspective we have previously adopted: different stages of vocational development present dynamic and specific challenges to individuals relevant for personality development, and successful work role investment generally elicits trait changes in the direction of greater functional maturity. However, as we will discuss below, the relatively small amount of research that is available on this topic at the same time calls for a number of refinements of this theoretical perspective in order to make it a promising avenue for future research and theory building in IWO settings

Discussion

In this review, we first highlighted the ways in which personality contributes to the paths people take in their working lives, their effectiveness and success, followed by the ways in which work contributes to establishment, development and change of people's personality. This final section is intended to integrate these two separate literatures. One observation from this review is that research on the longitudinal, dynamic, and reciprocal associations between work and personality constitutes quite a small literature. This most likely reflects the difficulty and the strong methodological requirements for conducting such research. That said, it is obvious that there is an urgent need for more longitudinal studies of personality and work and their reciprocal effects. Moreover, it is clear that various implications for conceptual development and empirical research in IWO psychology emerge when blending these two detached research lines. These are discussed in greater detail in the sections below.

Implications for Theory

The theoretical implications of integrating these separated research streams are manifold, though concentrate on three major issues at this stage, which have far-reaching consequences for theories of personality, work and vocational experiences and contexts, and theories on person-organization fit and dynamics respectively.

Do we Need to Reconsider the Stability of Traits? This question first stems from the general observation that traits continue to develop throughout adulthood, as evidenced by normative change patterns established across different raters and cultures (McCrae & Terracciano, 2005). According to the Five-Factor Theory of personality (FFT; McCrae & Costa, 2003), these normative changes result from a specific genetic predisposition to change, independent from environmental influences. An alternative explanation, however, is provided by perspectives emphasizing the role of social contextual factors on personality development, such as the Social Investment (Roberts et al., 2005) or the Sociogenic (Inkeles & Levinson, 1963) theories, which posit that investment in social institutions, including the work role, drive normative personality development.

Our review has shown that personality not only predicts career choices, but that our experiences in the work role also influence personality change. However, we also showed that there may be vocation- or occupation-specific effects on individual's personality development. Our review of the dynamic associations of personality and work outcomes indicated that traits that are accommodating in one vocational environment, or at a specific career or job stage, may be of less use or even a hindrance in others. Therefore, when studying the transactions between personality development and investment in the work role, it seems crucial to take specific

vocational characteristics into account (see also Wille, Beyers, & De Fruyt, 2012) in order to adequately model and understand individual personality developmental trajectories.

Our review highlights, for the first time in the IWO psychology literature, evidence suggesting reciprocal influences between personality and work experiences, which are non-normative, and rather dependent on vocational characteristics. Although it is unlikely to expect dramatic personality change, the literature today suggests normative *and* individual personality changes, challenging the assumption of traits as constructs that are not malleable or insensitive to change. Investment in the worker role is the mechanism to explain normative changes according to the social investment theory, whereas specific elements from the work environment or work experiences further impact on individual personality development trajectories. The implications of such findings are that personality theories will have to explain both stability, but also normative and individual changes, giving work experiences a key position in explaining individual developmental trajectories.

How to Theoretically Frame these Reciprocal Processes? Although different theoretical frameworks exist to account for differences in the occupational environment affecting personality, these have remained largely absent from the literature on personality development and work experiences. Below, we give a non-exhaustive overview of three well-established theories prominent in the IWO literature that are worth considering in this context.

A first theoretical perspective from the IWO literature that can be helpful to better frame and understand reciprocity between personality and work is the Theory of Work Adjustment (TWA; Dawis & Lofquist, 1984). A basic assumption of this theory is that each individual seeks to achieve and maintain correspondence with the environment, and work represents a major environment to which most individuals must relate. In general, this dynamic process entails both active and reactive adjustment, the latter referring to an individual's attempts to change his/her

behavioral tendencies, personal priorities, and/or work values in order to better suit the environment.

Second, in Trait Activation Theory (TAT; Tett & Burnett, 2003), behavior results from an interaction between person and situation, with situations acting as cues to activate certain traits. Specific traits are expressed in behavior when the situation or context allows freedom of trait expression, and when the features of the situation activate those specific traits. We proposed that TAT is relevant in the longitudinal examination of personality and its interaction with work because over time, the demands, contexts and situational features of work are in a state of flux. Moreover, repeated activation of certain traits may, over time, stimulate trait changes tuned to the work environment.

Finally, a review of personality and career development theory would be incomplete without mentioning John Holland's seminal contribution to this area (Holland, 1997). To most OB and career researchers, Holland's theory is about the selection of personality-congruent vocational or educational environments. It is far less widely acknowledged, however, that this theory also explicitly describes reciprocal effects. It is, for instance, argued that people in Enterprising environments acquire or are reinforced for traits such as ambition, energy, assertiveness, sociability, etc. (Holland, 1997, p. 47). A central but still heavily underexposed aspect of Holland's theory is about the (socialization) effects of vocational environments on those personality traits that selected people in these environments in the first place.

Discussing these different theories, it is clear that these need to be considered as complementary rather than competing or mutually exclusive frameworks, since they mainly differ in the explanatory processes about how traits and elements from the work environment are intertwined, but are convergent on the central notion of interdependency of traits and work characteristics that mutually affect each other. The implication is that reciprocal processes

between traits and occupational characteristics (a) can be studied from these different theoretical frames, (b) that findings from reciprocal research should be integrated in these different theories, and (c) that elements from all perspectives will have to be incorporated into a dynamic developmental model of personality *and work*.

Towards A Dynamic Developmental Model of Personality and Work

We believe that there is sufficient evidence in our review to propose an initial version of a dynamic developmental model (DDM) of personality and work, which integrates all key theoretical perspectives we have touched upon. In this DDM, traits should be conceptualized as being in constant interaction with work-related activities and environments, and are activated in the context of different career stages and job contexts.

In early life, traits lead children to develop preferences for certain work activity, learn associated competencies and skills, and establish vocational identities. Collectively, these processes set people on a pathway of education and training, which in part reflect their interests, but within which success is dependent on a core set of performance and learning related traits (e.g. Conscientiousness, Emotional Stability and Openness), which help to motivate people to work hard, master new things, and approach tasks without fear of failure. The corresponding principle proposes that as such traits are activated and used, they are strengthened and deepened, so that by giving advantage in education, they may give similar advantage in working life, explaining the longitudinal association of these traits with career and life success.

As people enter the working world, their choices are influenced by personality and preferences for occupational characteristics. People are attracted to tasks and activities that appeal to and suit their traits. Sociogenic theory and Social Investment theory propose that the work that

people do influences the development of their traits, and the longer a person works in a particular career path, the more invested s/he is, and the deeper the dependence of traits on work experience. From a TAT perspective, this might represent the repeated activation, and automatization of situational responses. By these mechanisms, the mere participation in the working world leads to our work becoming a core part of our personality, and while we are on a stable and established career path, contributing to the long-term stability of our identity and personality.

Longitudinal stability of personality may owe much to the processes of developing preferences for activities, practising them, applying them in a job, strengthening them, and then remaining in a career in which they are persistently activated from age 25 through to 65. Overtime, the dynamic demands of jobs mean that different traits are likely to be relevant to performance and success, and this perspective helps us to move our understanding on from the cross-sectional or short term validity of traits for predicting performance, to a richer understanding of when, how, and in what ways personality traits might help us to understand the divergences, convergences, twists and turns of people's working lives.

Avenues for Future Empirical Research

At the backdrop of our review it becomes clear that there are almost no studies that examine the reciprocal effects of personality and work in the IWO literature. All of the studies we have reviewed on this issue are more aligned to the personality and developmental literature. We have positioned work as being arguably the most important institutional contextual influence on personality in people's lives, and the absence of a literature on how work affects personality development may represent one of the biggest oversights in the field. Studies in this area may

more clearly reinforce the centrality of IWO psychology in understanding personality. Below we highlight some avenues for future research.

Trait Development and Work Congruence. As noted above, one finding from our review is about how work contributes to trait stability through reinforcing traits in a reciprocal way. The relationship in this case is one of congruence, by which traits are congruent with work environments. In this context it is important to know what kind of environmental characteristics affect and deepen specific traits, and especially how salient such characteristics or how frequent or intense such work experiences need to be for impacting upon traits. In addition, we do not know whether some traits are more vulnerable to change than others given specific appropriate environmental characteristics. We believe that the concept of congruence and deepening of traits is particularly relevant for selection researchers, selecting for specific personality profiles. The issue at stake here is how such desirable profiles can be progressively deepened and consolidated, by exposing new recruits to congruent first work experiences. Research on how such congruence can be achieved is strongly warranted.

Trait Development and Work Incongruence. Individuals may also experience incongruence between their traits and the environment. What might the implications be for personality change in such cases? An example of incongruence would be an introverted person who decides or finds him or herself in a job that requires them to be more extraverted and sociable. The traditional perspective would be that such conflict results in strain, and that behavior would persistently be perceived by the person as in conflict with their personality. Based on our DDM of personality and work, an alternative outcome might be a real shift in personality traits as a response to the incongruence. Although it is unlikely that a person low on Extraversion will suddenly become high on the dimension, modest change might be a possibility. The concept of incongruence and its consequences is extremely important for IWO psychologists

interested in targeted personality change. Coaching and development, for instance, often involves helping people to understand strengths and areas of inconsistency between traits and work requirements. So a further area for new research is on personality trait change in response to incongruence, and developmental interventions such as coaching, training, or on-job learning.

Career Developmental Transitions in Contemporary Working Life. The contemporary protean career perspective implies increased career mobility, with more frequent job changes but also prolonged careers, including new developmental transition points. Whereas the beginning career phase typically included multiple transition roles (leaving school, start living independently, entering a job, first stable relationship(s), etc.), the changing career landscape, involving multiple jobs over an extended time interval ranging from 21 to beyond 65, introduces new challenges for research. Questions about the role of personality in this new career context remain unanswered in research.

Moreover, an understudied area uncovered in our review is post-work experience. There is a lack of literature particularly on the longitudinal personality associates of retirement. Yet next to entry into the working world, the retirement transition is potentially one of the most important contexts for adjustment and change. Given the importance of work as a context for behavior through most of adult life, the sudden removal of that context is almost certain to have developmental consequences. We believe this constitutes an important area for future research with far reaching consequences for IWO psychology and society in general.

Methodological Considerations

In developing literature in this area, methodological challenges are presented by the need for longitudinal designs, and analyses that model change. In depth reviews of these

methodological issues are already available (Ferrer & McArdle, 2010; Ployhart & Vandenberg, 2010), but here we will comment on a selected number of important decisions to be made when setting up studies intended to address the longitudinal dynamic and developmental interplay of personality and work.

First, empirical tests of our initial DDM of personality and work require true longitudinal designs in which both personality *and* the work aspects of interest are tracked over time. Two important choices need to be considered in this context. First, the number of assessments needs to be decided upon, an issue that has also extensively been discussed elsewhere (Ployhart & Vandenberg, 2010). In the context of the research topic addressed in this review, and keeping in mind the relative dearth of studies that has investigated reciprocity in work and personality, we would argue that two assessment points (or waves) is the absolute minimum. However designs with three or more waves of data offer a number of important advantages with regard to the statistical modelling of change, including the possibility to examine nonlinear change *trajectories* and a closer examination of the directionality in reciprocal effects. Nevertheless, valuable insights in this relatively young field of research on the reciprocity of work and personality have already resulted from excellent studies that adopted the right statistical techniques to study change using two-wave designs (e.g., Wu & Griffin, 2012).

A second, related decision concerns the length of the time intervals, which should be guided by relevant theory. When studying reciprocal effects between work and personality, it is important to bear in mind that personality change is modest in nature. Typically, individuals do experience dramatic transformation, but rather gradually develop over long periods of time (e.g., 10 years; Roberts & Wood, 2006). Many of the studies that we reviewed here indeed drew on longitudinal data collection projects that spanned over 5 to 10 years. However, some studies also adopted a different strategy, focusing on theoretically critical development points (e.g. Bleidorn,

in press; examining high-school graduation). We see this as a good example of how to study the effects of important transition moments in the professional career on aspects of personality without having to invest in a 10-year longitudinal design.

Analytical Considerations

Alongside appropriate longitudinal study design comes the selection of appropriate statistical models for examining dynamics. One such approach is latent change score (LCS) models (McArdle, 2009). This technique has remained rather absent from the IWO literature. LCS models combine assessment of change (i.e. growth or decline) and dynamics among multiple processes, and are therefore particularly appropriate to evaluate hypotheses involving both interrelations among various constructs, and changes in those constructs over time (Ferrer & McArdle, 2010).

However, a limitation of LCS is that no causal inferences are justified. While LCS models enable analyses that attenuate ambiguities in the *directional effects* between interrelated processes, this is not equivalent to establishing causal inferences. For those, researchers would need to combine the dynamic longitudinal methodology described above with experimental designs that can rule out third variable effects. Clearly, such studies are challenging to carry out in the context of reciprocal effects between personality and work. However, we invite scholars to come up with creative research that combines the strengths of longitudinal approaches with more experimental approaches. We further encourage IWO scholars to be inspired by research from other disciplines in psychology, such as developmental psychology, where such methodologies are more widely adopted.

Epilogue

Just like this review has demonstrated not only longitudinal but also reciprocal influences between traits and occupational characteristics, its discussion should be seen as a call for IWO and personality psychologists to join research lines that mutually fertilize each other's discipline with real impact on their respective professional fields. In the nineties, trait psychology got a strong boost via the meta-analytic work done in IWO psychology underscoring the validity of traits to predict various occupational criteria. We hope that our review of some challenging research findings in the area of developmental personality psychology and the identification of some promising research lines has a similar effect on research in IWO psychology.

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